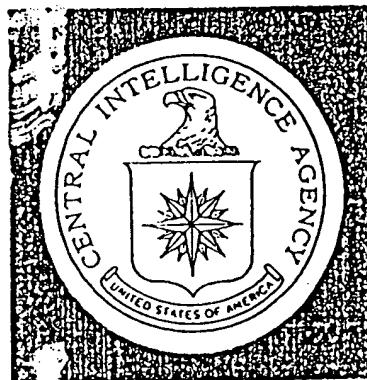


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The Evolution of Soviet Doctrine on Limited War

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
9 October 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Evolution of Soviet Doctrine on Limited War

Summary

Soviet military writers have given increasing attention in recent years to the proposition that the Soviet armed forces should be equipped and trained for limited military emergencies, and not just general war alone.

Their writings do not, however, reflect a fully articulated doctrine of flexible response, nor do they distinguish the requirements posed by the possibility of distant limited military actions from those posed by the possibility of limited military actions in areas close to the homeland.

As the Soviet Union's confidence in deterrent capabilities increases with the growth of its strategic offensive and defensive forces, the military leaders will probably turn increasing attention to the problems involved in upgrading the capabilities of the Soviet armed forces to support foreign policy in various areas of the world. This will probably lead them to press the government for somewhat larger and more versatile general purpose forces, with greater lift and support capabilities.

The Soviet Union already has limited capabilities for asserting a "presence" in areas of political contention, and hence for a more active employment of military power in pursuit of foreign policy

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objectives. The exercise of these capabilities depends less on the adequacy of the forces available than on the willingness of the political leadership to accept the political and military risks that commitment of military forces might entail.

That limited war is possible, and that the Soviet Union should prepare to deal with both nuclear and nonnuclear military emergencies, are propositions that are by now well established in Soviet military doctrine. There is considerable uncertainty, however, as to precise implications of the Soviet doctrine, largely because the texts in which these ideas are expressed are difficult to interpret and correlate. By classifying these texts under the concepts they seem to express, and by illustrating these concepts with typical examples, we can get a better idea of how the Soviet view on limited war is evolving.

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The Evidence on the Soviet View

There is, properly speaking, no doctrine of flexible response in Soviet military writings. There is, rather, a sequence of observations about the nature of war, and about the defense problems facing the Soviet Union, that reflect a growing appreciation of the need for maintaining and developing a broad range of military capabilities. These observations have been made during a period of years when profound changes were taking place in the structure of Soviet forces, and when political battles were being fought over the role of the general purpose forces in the country's defense posture.

These circumstances may explain some of the ambiguities that characterize Soviet statements on limited war. In drawing attention to the possibility of limited war, and in stressing the utility of nonnuclear forces, Soviet military writers have been concerned, not only with adjusting their doctrine to the realities of a changing strategic environment, but also with defending the vested institutional interests to which they are committed. The maintenance of large ground forces, equipped with the full panoply of weapons that the nation's science and industry are able to provide, has always ranked high among these interests.

Soviet military writings on limited war and the utility of conventional forces are not merely meretricious, however. Whatever axes they may have to grind, Soviet officers are conscious of their professional responsibility to work for continuous improvements of the military power needed to support the policies of the regime. There is unmistakable evidence that they have studied American writings on the doctrine of flexible response with great care. And there can be little doubt that Soviet officers have drawn lessons from the successes the United States has achieved in various crisis situations in recent years by its ability to back up its policy with appropriate military forces.

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In their occasional direct and indirect references to these US actions there is a clear implication that Soviet military writers are pointing up a need for the development of similar capabilities by the Soviet Union. Thus far, however, they have not spelled out this need, perhaps because the concept of distant limited military action is so closely identified in their writings with the practices of "imperialism" that it would be politically awkward to do so.

Early References to Limited War

References to the possibility of limited war have a relatively long history in Soviet doctrinal writings. The first reaction to the emergence of the US doctrine of flexible response in the early 1960's was to dismiss the idea as a Western device for applying military pressure against the Communist world without provoking a general war. This line was well suited to buttressing Khrushchev's strategy of nuclear deterrence. However, some serious attention to the possibility of Soviet involvement in a limited conflict began to appear as part of the military reaction to Khrushchev's efforts to reduce the conventional forces sharply. Although the possibility of limited war was considered in only the most vague terms, these references indicated that the military had not bought Khrushchev's view that the only contingency worth preparing for was a general nuclear war. Marshal Sokolovskiy's book, Military Strategy, published in 1962 and 1963, reflected both these divergent interests. It asserted that hostilities involving the nuclear powers would lead to a general war, but it also said that the Soviet armed forces should be prepared for limited war.

Less ambiguous reference to the possibility of limited war also appeared at this time as in the following examples:

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Soviet military science considers that the imperialists may engage us in one or another form of war without the use of nuclear weapons. The practical conclusion from this is that our armed forces should be ready to respond in an appropriate manner with conventional weapons. (Major D. Kazakov, May 1963)

In modern war...if things develop in one way then military operations will be characterized by the massive use of nuclear weapons, if in another way then by their partial use, and if in still a third way then by a complete abstention from their use. It all depends on the conditions, the place, and the time. (Colonel I. Grudinin, November 1963)

With Khrushchev's removal, a more vigorous examination of these ideas began. There was a clear implication in statements in late 1965 that the subject was being given a new look. Some of these statements carried a critical flavor, as though the authors were calling for greater attention to the problem.

One must not forget about the "small wars" which the imperialists are continually waging. Theoretical thinking ought to take this situation into account and give more attention to the problem of conducting local wars. (Lt. Colonel Ye. Rybkin, September 1965)

Another statement gave tacit testimony to this renewal of interest in the subject by implying that Soviet military theorists were already giving adequate attention to the subject.

The infantry, as before, will remain the main and decisive force in local wars, without the use or with limited use of nuclear weapons. The possibility of the emergence of such wars is neither denied nor ignored since they are already waged by

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imperialists in various areas of the globe.
(Colonel General Shtemenko, November 1965)

These statements, which suggested some acceptance of the possibility of limited war, were matched in the same period by other comments suggesting that a direct clash between the major nuclear powers could not be kept limited. These comments provide some definition of the problem faced by Soviet planners in coming to grips with the US strategy of flexible response. This problem was focused sharply on Europe, because this was the area of the maximum commitment of the USSR. The notion of a new and more complicated set of conditions for the European theater was difficult to accept and met with considerable skepticism.

It is obvious that a war in Europe, saturated with nuclear rocket weapons, could immediately take on the widest scope. How is it possible to use the term "local war" at all, as applied to the European continent? (Maj. General V. Zemskov, August 1965)

The skepticism was also stated in broader terms, showing a strong expectation that any conflict involving the nuclear powers or threatening their vital interests would escalate or expand.

It is obvious that the probability of the escalation of a limited war into a nuclear world war if nuclear powers become involved in the conflict is always great and under certain circumstances may become inevitable. (Colonel General N. Lomov, October 1965)

Local wars, especially those touching upon the interests of the socialist camp, intrinsically threaten to go beyond the original territorial bounds. (Colonel S. Malyanchikov, October 1965)

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As the above remarks suggest, the idea of limited warfare between the nuclear powers was not being rejected as categorically as it had been under Khrushchev. Some Soviet officers seemed to be more willing than others to concede the possibility of such warfare. In a private conversation in June, 1965, for example, Marshal Rotmistrov asserted that the Soviet Union would maintain the ability to overrun Europe in 60 to 90 days in either a nuclear or nonnuclear situation. Thus, he appeared to be saying that a war in Europe could be limited to conventional weapons. At the same time, Rotmistrov was emphasizing the long-held marshals' view that Europe should be kept hostage to the massive military might of the USSR. He stressed that the USSR is a "continental power" which "must maintain control of Europe," for which purpose the Soviet ground forces had been strengthened both with nuclear missiles and with conventional arms. His conception did not necessarily imply a heightened expectation that a war between the nuclear powers could be kept limited. Rather, it implied a recognition that conventional warfare capabilities were essential to the defense posture of the Soviet Union in Europe.

Development of Limited War Theory in Post-Khrushchev Period

In early 1966 it became apparent that some resolution of Soviet views on limited war was in the making. The idea of limited conflict was now treated as a realistic possibility, although where such conflicts were most likely to occur was still not specified. There was a new tendency, moreover, to discuss the subject in declarative terms, to assert that the Soviet Union not only recognized the possibility of limited war but was actually preparing its forces for this contingency.

The Soviet armed forces must be ready to ensure the defeat of the enemy not only under conditions in which nuclear weapons are employed, but also in which only conventional means of conflict are utilized.
(Colonel I. Prusanov, January 1966)

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Soviet military doctrine proceeds from the fact that to achieve victory both in conventional and nuclear war other branches of the armed forces (besides the Strategic Rocket Forces) will be called upon to play a great role--the Ground, Air, Air Defense, and Naval Forces.
(Communist of the Armed Forces, January 1966)

These observations in the doctrinal literature were strengthened by a policy-level statement of Minister of Defense Malinovskiy:

The Ground Forces still remain one of the basic types of armed forces. They are the forces entrusted with the task of finally crushing the aggressor's ground forces immediately after the nuclear rocket attack.... They can play an even more important role in a war in which conventional weapons are used. (Marshal Malinovskiy, February 1966)

The credibility of these statements was reinforced by several Warsaw Pact exercises. Beginning in 1965 these joint maneuvers included the idea of flexible response as a doctrinal theme, although the short conventional phase of the maneuvers indicated that the likelihood of escalation to general nuclear war was rated as high. Nevertheless, the exercises demonstrated that a flexible response doctrine was indeed beginning to have an impact on Soviet planning for the European theater. This was confirmed in public statements, such as this comment by an officer engaged in the fall 1966 maneuvers:

The aims and objectives of the maneuvers were naturally considered not only from the aspect of our own military doctrine, but also from the aspect of the military aims of the adversary. It is well known that the strategic military concept of the United States--the theory of flexible response--admits the possibility of wars with limited use of

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nuclear weapons or with conventional weapons only. (Lt. General Prchlik, September 1966)

The statements which have appeared thus far in 1967 have broadened the concept of limited war situations to include a "whole range" of possibilities. What these possibilities include, however, remains to be spelled out.

Our military doctrine provides that the Soviet armed forces must be ready to conduct both a world and a limited war, with employment of nuclear weapons or without them. (Colonel N. Kozlov, February 1967)

Modern conditions do not exclude the possibility of the appearance of wars which differ in scale and in means of combat. In the imperialist countries, preparation is proceeding not only for a global nuclear rocket war, but for wars which correspond to the most diverse levels of "escalation" of aggression. (Colonel Yu. Vlasyevich, June 1967)

The Uses of Military Power in Non-War Situations

Most Soviet statements on the uses of limited military power assume the employment of this power in some form of overt hostilities. This can be explained, in part, by the fact that most writing on this subject is done by military officers whose principal subject of concern has been the ground forces. Recently, however, there has been some broadening of this conceptual framework in Soviet military writings. Several statements by naval officers have reflected a new emphasis on the peacetime uses of military power. This appears to mark a new departure in Soviet military thinking, and may point the way towards departures in policy which would represent a Soviet form of strategy of flexible response.

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The following quotation from an article by the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy is representative of this new note in Soviet doctrinal thinking:

By a well balanced navy we mean a navy which, in composition and armament, is capable of carrying out missions assigned it, not only in a nuclear rocket war, but in a war which does not make use of nuclear weapons, and is also able to support state interests at sea in peacetime. (Admiral Gorshkov, January 1967)

As the military position of the Soviet Union improves with the growth of its strategic offensive and defensive forces, the Soviet military leadership will probably turn increasing attention to the problem of adapting their forces for use in limited conflict situations. This prospect may already be adding impetus to current equipment programs which are aimed at improving Soviet capabilities in this respect. The AN-22 heavy air transport will begin to come into service in late 1967 or 1968, and the large Alligator-class landing ship began to appear in 1966.

In the meantime, the Soviet Union already has limited capabilities for asserting a "presence" in areas of political contention, and hence for a more active employment of military power in pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Whether to exercise these capabilities is a political rather than a military question. It depends less on the adequacy of the forces available than on the willingness of the political leadership to accept the political and military risks that the commitment of military forces might entail. In some cases, quickness of response rather than the magnitude of the forces brought to bear could be the decisive factor in influencing the outcome of a local crisis. The Soviet Union could begin to practice a more active politico-military strategy, even without the forces capable of fighting limited wars in areas remote from the homeland, and even without a theory on flexible response fully articulated in its doctrine.

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